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Memo to President Mario Soares

Current shifts in the Indonesian regime

In preparation for the Council of State which is to be held on Wednesday, 10 March 1993, to discuss Portugal's policy on the question of East Timor, we take this opportunity of submitted some thoughts and information about the forthcoming shifts in the leadership of the Indonesian regime and suggest conclusions on the relevance of these shifts in seeking a solution to the East Timor question.

[Many new appointments to the cabinet and the armed forces will occur soon after the MPR session which ends on 11 March so this comment comes at a rather inconvenient time from this point of view.]

1. ABRI reinforces its position

The Indonesian Armed Forces (ABRI) has long sought to increase its influence at the most senior level of Suharto's New Order. For years, Suharto has been able to curb their influence, relying on selected individuals to assist him in running the regime, and appointing armed forces personnel personally loyal to him to fill key posts in the top echelons of ABRI. Suharto's determination to appoint Sudharmono as vice-president in 1988 was typical of his refusal to listen to ABRI advice.

Still licking their wounds from this 1988 humiliation, ABRI have now made it virtually impossible for Suharto to ignore its preferred candidate for the post of vice-president by formally nominating General Try Sutrisno for the post and winning support from the other MPR fractions for the nomination. [Never before has there been any formal nomination for vice-president; the choice has always been left to Suharto.] ABRI has in effect ambushed Suharto. General Try is well-known as a hardliner from the repressive actions he has ordered; his outspoken comments immediately after the 1991 Dili Massacre are of course very well-known.

As vice-president, Try is in line to become Suharto's successor should Suharto die during his sixth term. Otherwise, the position of vice-president has little major influence unless Try uses it, as spokesman of ABRI, to push Suharto around. However, Try is widely regarded as a man of less than average intelligence and may not be able to exert much influence over the wily Suharto. He once spent four years as Suharto's adjutant and may still have feelings of deference towards his former boss.

Shifts in the ABRI leadership however are a different matter. General Edi Sudradjat took over as ABRI commander-in-chief when Try retired a couple of weeks ago to make himself available for the vice-presidential job. It is not certain that General Edi will continue in this position after the new Cabinet is formed; he may move on to become minister of defence. Other top-ranking ABRI officers thought likely to hold leading positions in the new configuration are people like Lt.Generals Feisal Tanjung (who headed

the military investigation into the Dili massacre) and Wismoyo Arismunandar (Suharto's brother-in-law), Maj.Gens. Hartas Hersudiono, Suryadi and Sintong Panjaitan (removed as commander of Udayana military command after the Dili massacre). With the exception of Hartas, all are from Kopassus, the red-beret special forces and have a great deal of combat experience, including experience in East Timor. These men are likely to hold the portfolios of defence, the interior, minister-coordinator for security and political affairs (General Benny Murdani is tipped for this job), as well as ABRI commander-in-chief, army chief-of-staff and so on. With the exception of Murdani who comes from the 'bridging generation', these are all new generation 'post-1945' military officers, products of the Military Academy (AMN) which first started producing graduates in 1960. General Edi of the 1960 class is the first of this new, 'post-1945' generation to be taking over the reins of regime control. They are hardened combat men and their assumption of power signals a hardening of regime leadership.

This comes at a time when activist groups in Indonesia have organised themselves more effectively, when industrial strikes and land disputes are mounting and when activism in favour of democratisation and an end to human rights abuses has strengthened. Hence the possibility for conflict will greatly increase. Nor should we ignore the growing push for human rights internationally, the new Clinton administration in Washington and the greater commitment to the right to self-determination. A hardened leadership in Jakarta will make Indonesia even more out-of-step with global shifts towards democratisation, even as compared to the rapidly developing economies of Asia like Thailand and South Korea where the military are being gradually forced to take a back seat. This could mean greater pressure on Indonesia on all sectors of the human rights front, including of course over East Timor.

Putting the historical record straight in East Timor

Official Indonesian propaganda has always insisted that there was no army invasion in 1975, that only 'volunteers' went to help the four anti-Fretilin parties establish order after the civil war of August 1975. This has made it impossible for the army to enjoy the glory of having fought heroically to gain control of the territory.

There is evidence now that Kolakops commander Brig.Gen. Theo Syafei wants to put the historical record straight by asserting that the army *did* wage years of combat to subdue East Timor. During a visit to East Timor by a group of Indonesian journalists in February this year, he said that ABRI fought Fretilin, then armed with 17,000 weapons, from 1975 to 1977/78 to seize control of the district and sub-district capitals and from 1978-1980 fought to seize villages in the interior from Fretilin control. The third period in his periodisation of the war, from 1980-1983, was when ABRI battled to wipe out Fretilin remnants. This new version articulated publicly for the first time ever, signals that the up-coming generation of army officers (Sjafei is a 1965 AMN graduate and could soon move into the second echelon of ABRI leaders in the new leadership) now argue that their 'struggle' role in East Timor has been ignored for too long, overshadowed by claims about the Balibo declaration and the 1976 'people's assembly' decision leading to integration. Syafei's version is of course much closer to the truth and could signal a desire by the new hardline regime leadership to demand a greater say in seeking a solution to the East Timor conflict along different lines from those pursued up to now by Suharto and Ali Alatas.

It was Syafei too who in January this year spoke contemptuously about the futility of talks with Portugal and called for an end to UN-sponsored talks with Portugal; he expressed a preference for the Vatican to play a mediating role to the exclusion of both Portugal and the UN. Syafei's remark evoked no public response from anyone, including Ali Alatas, although it was a direct challenge to Jakarta's attempts to seek a UN-based diplomatic solution. It is difficult to assess the extent to which Syafei was expressing ABRI

views as well as his own. Nor is there any way of knowing whether he had in mind the Catholic community which played a mediating role in the Mozambiquan negotiations, but that possibility should not be ruled out.

Belo's call for autonomy

No doubt fearful of the ever worsening prospects for East Timor, Bishop Belo has again raised his voice in favour of a degree of autonomy as a way of lifting the burden on his people. First, it is necessary to stress that the Indonesian constitution provides no opening for such a solution; however, if negotiations were to pursue this line of thought, the army may see the advantage of making a gesture in this direction. But army-style autonomy would bring no change on the ground. On several occasions when advocating autonomy, Bishop Belo has made it clear this should be accompanied by demilitarisation of the territory. Syafei could easily claim that this is being achieved with the (eventual) disbandment of Kolakops and the alleged deployment of soldiers for 'development' duties, not combat. As the Bishop has himself pointed out, these 'territorial' duties increase army presence in every village and hamlet, well placed to control everything that happens.and reinforce the army's role as an apparatus for repression and annihilation.

If there is to be talk about a transitional stage, the terms must be clear: demilitarisation under UN supervision as a prelude to the establishment of democratic organs in preparation for a referendum. Any talk of autonomy as the final solution for East Timor on terms dictated by the army would leave the East Timorese at the mercy of the forces of occupation who have shown no intention of loosening their grip.

Conclusions

How are the shifts in the regime leadership and in the army's interpretation of the process of integration likely to affect the chances of seeking an international solution?

1. Left to their own devices, the hardline leaders will be even more adamant about making no concessions, while continuing to tighten their iron grip on East Timor. The prospects for the people of East Timor look grim indeed.

2. These are circumstances in which Portugal has no option but to redouble its efforts to press for a comprehensive solution, by marshalling all possible support from the international community. The change in Washington should help in this connection.

3. The re-establishment of a full-fledged military regime in place of the Suharto shift towards civilianisation (to pursue his own power interests and unrelated to any shift towards democratisation) could also harden attitudes of the western powers towards Indonesia, no longer dealing only with the 'nice Mr Suharto' but with hard-nosed combat generals. This is a development that should work in favour of Portugal's campaign to win greater support in the west.

4. Certainly, Portugal should do nothing to offer concessions to the new hardened regime leadership. The idea of offering to negotiate on the question of autonomy is even more hazardous in light of the political shift in Jakarta. To come to a modus in such circumstances would leave the people of East Timor without a shred of international protection.

London, 8 March 1993